

February/March 2015

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

Spring Valley Wind Energy Facility: A Golden Eagle fatality was discovered on Feb. 9, 2015. The BLM Ely district is working with Pattern Energy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Nevada Department of Wildlife to address the incident. *(See page 4 for more information)*

Gold Rock Mine Project: The BLM has released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for Midway Gold US Inc.'s proposed Gold Rock Mine Project in White Pine County, located about 50 miles west of Ely. The public is invited to comment during a 45-day review period that concludes **Monday, March 30, 2015**. The BLM has scheduled three public meetings in Nevada, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. *(See page 11 for more information)*

Mosier Canyon Land Sales: The BLM Ely District is proposing to offer for sale two adjacent 40-acre parcels of public land near South Industrial Way, about 2 miles north of Ely, in White Pine County, Nev. The BLM will accept written comments on the proposal during a 45-day public comment period which ends **March 2, 2015**. *(See page 10 for more information)*

Squaw Peak Land Sale: The BLM Ely District is proposing to offer through a competitive sale a 38.02-acre parcel of public land about one-quarter mile northwest of Ely, in White Pine County, Nev. The BLM will accept written comments on the proposal during a 45-day public comment period which ends **March 2, 2015**. *(See page 10 for more information)*

Temporary Seasonal Firefighters: The BLM Ely District is accepting applications for temporary seasonal firefighters. Applications will be accepted through **March 31, 2015**. *(See page 6 for more information)*

Michael Herder named BLM Ely District Manager: Michael Herder started in his new position as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Ely District Manager on December 28. Mike has served as the Associate District Manager in Ely for the past eight years. Prior to that, he was a wildlife biologist with the BLM Arizona Strip District. Mike has served in numerous leadership positions at various organizational levels for more than 10 years. Prior to this appointment, Mike served as the acting Deputy State Director for Minerals in Nevada, as well as completing a five month assignment as acting Branch Chief for Renewable Resources. He served as acting Elko District Manager in 2012 and as a field manager in the Ely District in 2008.

## ELY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Ely Resource Management Plan (RMP) is expected to undergo review as a result of a November 2012 Idaho District Court decision on a Western Watershed Project (WWP)

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challenge of 18 RMPs across six western states. The court examined as “test cases” the Pinedale and Craters of the Moon RMPs prepared by the BLM Pinedale and Twin Falls districts, in Wyoming and Idaho, respectively. The court ruled that BLM must amend the two RMPs to address identified deficiencies. The court dismissed challenges to two other RMPs, leaving 14 RMPs in place pending the outcome of the “test cases.” The Ely RMP is one of the 14 remaining RMPs.

Although the RMPs identify major factors in the loss of sagebrush habitat (including energy development and livestock use), WWP is questioning whether the challenged RMPs sufficiently address declining Greater Sage Grouse populations. WWP contends that the RMPs in question do not reference or follow guidance from the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the BLM National Sage Grouse Strategy, BLM Special Status Species Policy and conservation assessments. The suit also contends that BLM did not consider/analyze alternatives calling for reduced or no livestock grazing, despite the fact that grazing was found to be a “major contributing factor” to the decline of sage grouse habitat.

WWP has also filed a motion to consolidate their appeal of the Ely RMP and their appeal of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment in District Court in Idaho (*see Watershed Analysis*).

The BLM Ely District is completing a scheduled five-year review of the Ely RMP, per the direction of the BLM Nevada State Office.

### **WATERSHED ANALYSIS**

The Western Watershed Project (WWP) in December 2012 appealed the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Environmental Assessment’s Decision Record for vegetation projects and Final Decision for range projects. In June 2013, WWP withdrew their appeals regarding the watershed restoration plan and instead filed a complaint with the District Court in Idaho, asking that it be consolidated with their case against the Ely District Resource Management Plan. On March 13, 2014, the District Court in Idaho denied WWP’s Motion to Consolidate, and transferred the case to the District Court in Nevada.

The Ely District is preparing a watershed restoration plan for the South Spring Valley and Hamblin Valley watersheds. A preliminary environmental assessment (EA) is expected to be released for public comment in early 2015.

The BLM issued the Newark and Huntington Watershed Restoration Plan Finding of No Significant Impact; Decision Record for vegetation treatments; and Proposed Decision for range improvements in September 2014. The Proposed Decision was protested by WWP, and the Decision Record was appealed by WWP in October 2014. The Decision Record has been rescinded in order to incorporate additional analysis on Cumulative Effects. A new Decision Record is expected in early 2015.

The BLM expects in 2014 to release for public review the proposed watershed restoration plans for Toquop Wash and Tule Desert, and Beaver Dam Wash.

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Watershed analysis has been completed on the Cave Valley, Lake Valley, Antelope Valley, North Antelope, Gleason Creek, North Spring Valley, Smith Valley, Steptoe A, South Steptoe, Dry Lake Valley, Panaca Valley, Kane Springs Wash, Clover Creek North and South, and White River South watersheds.

Watershed characterization has been completed for the Long Valley/Ruby Valley watershed implementation plan and analysis has begun. It is anticipated to be complete in FY16.

The BLM Ely District, in collaboration with the USDA Agriculture Research Station and National Resource Conservation Service, has developed Ecological Site State and Transition Models for Major Land Resource Areas 28A and 28B, which will benefit watershed planning and grazing strategies, and vegetation treatments. These models will be presented at the 2015 National Society of Range Management Conference in Sacramento. The project was funded by the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

### **SAGE GROUSE PLANNING**

The BLM and Forest Service are addressing comments from the cooperating agencies on the Nevada and Northeastern California Sub-regional Greater Sage-Grouse Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment and Final Environmental Impact Statement (PLUP/FEIS). The PLUP/FEIS should be available to the public in spring/summer 2015. The Record of Decision is expected in September 2015.

The PLUP/FEIS considers six possible management alternatives for maintaining and increasing habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse on BLM and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest lands in Nevada and Northeastern California. More than 17 million acres of Greater Sage-Grouse habitat are managed by the BLM and Forest Service within the sub-regional area.

In March 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined that listing the Greater Sage-Grouse as a threatened or endangered species was “warranted, but precluded.” The FWS determined that current and potential threats to Greater Sage-Grouse habitat and inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms pose “a significant threat to the Greater Sage-Grouse now and in the foreseeable future.”

The Nevada and Northeastern California Greater Sage-Grouse EIS is one of 15 EISs that are being conducted as part of BLM’s and Forest Service’s west-wide National Greater Sage-Grouse planning effort, to provide additional measures to maintain and increase Greater Sage-Grouse habitat on public lands to preclude the birds listing.

## ENERGY

### Natural Gas-fired Energy Development -

Toquop Energy Project: The BLM has issued a Notice to Proceed to Toquop Energy, Inc., for a natural gas-fired power plant. Construction can start once the proponent satisfies conditions outlined in the Notice. The BLM is currently working on a right-of-way (ROW) application for project-related water development in the Tule Valley. The EA is in process.

Toquop Energy, Inc. is simultaneously pursuing purchasing lands necessary to construct the plant and ancillary facilities. The Ely Resource Management Plan provides for the disposal of up to 640 acres for power plant development. The BLM will dispose of no more than 200 acres because of a conflict with the Western Wide Energy Corridor.

### Wind Energy Development -

Ely Wind Mountain: The BLM has received Cherry Creek Wind's Plan of Development (PoD) for a proposed project in the Robinson Summit. The Robinson Summit Wind Energy Project is a wind energy generation facility currently planned within 5,000 acres of public land. The project is located approximately 9 miles northwest of Ely, in White Pine County, Nev. The project will generate up to 200 megawatts (MW) of clean, renewable electricity. The project's primary structures would include up to 83 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with a nameplate capacity anticipated from 2.3 to 3.3 MW. Related and supporting components will include an underground, 34.5-kilovolt (kV) electrical collection system to collect energy from the WTGs, a project substation to convert the voltage of the electrical collection system to that of the Robinson Summit Substation to which the project will interconnect, an operations and maintenance facility, up to three permanent and six temporary lattice meteorological towers, an interconnecting road network consisting of arterial roads and wind turbine array roads, and other facilities used to develop, build, or maintain the project (e.g., construction laydown yard, temporary batch plant, pad mounted transformers, crane paths). Two pre-application meetings will be scheduled in the near future, prior to acceptance of the PoD.

Spring Valley Wind: A Golden Eagle fatality was discovered on Feb. 9, 2015. This is the second eagle fatality in three years. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), comprised of wildlife biologists from the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Nevada Department of Wildlife, will review the incident, in accordance with the Avian and Bat Protection Plan. The mortality threshold for Golden Eagles is one per year. If the threshold is exceeded, the TAC will recommend mitigation procedures to prevent future fatalities.

Spring Valley Wind has been in operation since late-summer 2012. After 533 bats were recorded killed by the wind turbines in 2013, triple the amount allowed by federal regulators, mitigation measures were initiated enacting a new "cut-in" speeds for the turbines, increasing the wind speed required to spin the turbine from 7 mph to 11

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mph. In 2014 the bat mortality rates were reduced by more than 75-percent as compared to the same time frame last year. Mortality surveys completed so far this year recorded only 23 bat fatalities. Last year at this time there were 103 bat fatalities recorded.

### Solar Energy Development -

Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is in the process of developing a Regional Mitigation Strategy for compensating unavoidable impacts associated with the development of the 25,069-acre Dry Lake Valley North Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) in Lincoln County, Nev.

The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ, located in north Dry Lake Valley about 45 miles northeast of Alamo, is one of five solar energy zones in Nevada. In all, there are 17 SEZ in six western states, Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah. If fully built, projects within the designated zones could produce as much as 23,700 megawatts of solar energy, sufficient to serve approximately 7 million homes.

While the BLM requires developers to take all reasonable measures to avoid and/or minimize impacts on the project site, there are often unavoidable impacts associated with developing land for solar power generation, and the loss of the resource values is often long-term. Accordingly, the BLM solar energy program requires consideration of compensatory mitigation, which involves the protection and/or restoration of resource values off the project site, but in the same region. The Regional Mitigation Strategy for the Dry Lake Valley North SEZ will identify the unavoidable impacts associated with developing this SEZ, describe those unavoidable impacts that warrant compensatory mitigation, present proposed mitigation actions (such as restoring native vegetation in disturbed areas) and where those actions could occur, and recommend a per acre fee to be paid by developers to fund the compensatory mitigation actions. The Dry Lake Valley North SEZ Regional Mitigation Strategy is expected to be completed early in 2015. The public will have to opportunity to review and comment on the draft Strategy.

Interim products and information on the project can be obtained from the BLM Caliente Field Office, 1400 South Front Street, Caliente; BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, Ely; and online at [http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/ely\\_field\\_office/blm\\_programs/energy/dry\\_lake\\_valley\\_north/project\\_documents.html](http://www.blm.gov/nv/st/en/fo/ely_field_office/blm_programs/energy/dry_lake_valley_north/project_documents.html)

### Hydro Energy -

White Pine Pumped Storage Project: Gridflex Energy, LLC, in September 2013 submitted a preliminary permit application for the White Pine Pumped Storage Project facility. Gridflex and White Pine Water Power, LLC, are proposing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to construct a stored water pumping facility north of Ely, Nev. The proposed White Pine Pumped Storage Project would generate utilize three generators with 300 MW total capacity to generate 919,800 megawatt-hours, annually.

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A permit is issued only to allow the permit holder to investigate the feasibility of the project while the permittee conducts investigations and secures necessary data to determine the feasibility of the proposed project and to prepare a license application. FERC has given the initial approvals to begin working with the BLM to develop a plan of development, begin the NEPA process, and develop natural resource and economic data. FERC will lead the project.

### Electrical Transmission Development -

ON Line Project: Reclamation is in the final phases and development of a plan for wildlife and restoration monitoring is underway. The high-voltage line that connects NV Energy's northern and southern electrical grids and provides for the transmission of renewable energy was formally dedicated in January 2014.

Trans West Express Project: The BLM expects to make the final environmental impact statement available to the public in early 2015. The proposed 500 kilovolt electrical transmission line would extend from south-central Wyoming, through Colorado and Utah, to southern Nevada. The power line would enter Nevada through the southeast corner of Lincoln County. Three routes are proposed for analysis. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead office for the project.

The Zephyr Project: The BLM is scheduling public meetings and selecting a contractor to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Electric Transmission Line Project that would originate in the Wheatland/Chugwater area of Wyoming and extend 950-plus miles to Eldorado Valley, south of Las Vegas. BLM Wyoming received the application and Plan of Development in March 2012.

## FIRE

### Fire Management –

Employment: The BLM Ely District is accepting applications for temporary seasonal firefighters. Applications will be accepted through **Tuesday, March 31, 2015**. Positions are available on engines, in Helitack and dispatch. Successful applicants will serve in Caliente, Ely or Pony Springs. Applications must be submitted online at [usajobs.gov](http://usajobs.gov), available through the following link: <http://www.firejobs.doi.gov>.

Length of appointment varies depending on agency needs and funding, but cannot exceed 180 days, excluding overtime and training. The normal term of employment is from May through mid-September. Salaries range from \$11.06 and \$15.05 per hour, depending on experience. Applicants must be a U.S. citizen and 18 years of age at time of employment. Selected individuals are required to complete a physical examination and drug screening prior to employment and are subject to random drug testing during their time of service. Those in primary firefighting positions must also complete a "pack test" upon entering duty, which consists of hiking three miles over flat terrain in 45 minutes or less while carrying a 45-pound pack.

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For more information, contact Ely District Assistant Fire Management Officer Ray Maestes at (775) 289-1923, Caliente Field Office Fire Operations Supervisor Ty Mizer at (775) 726-8112, Fire Helicopter Supervisor Juan Torrealday at (775) 293-3065, or Pony Springs Fire Operations Supervisor Robert Washburn at (775) 724-3181.

Current Fire Conditions: Abnormally dry conditions remain, statewide. BLM Ely District Fire Management reminds area residents to recreate safely. Learn more at <http://on.doi.gov/1wYFiht>

### Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation –

Cottonwood Fire: The BLM Ely District in December aurally-seeded a mixture of grasses, forbs and shrubs over approximately 1,210 acres of the July 2014, lightning-ignited Cottonwood Fire, located about 15 miles southeast of Pioche, Nev., to mitigate erosion, promote vegetative recovery and stem expansion of invasive plants and noxious weeds.

Black Fire: In coordination with Great Basin National Park, the BLM Ely District in December aurally-seeded a mixture of grasses, forbs and shrubs over approximately 360 acres of National Park Service and BLM-administered lands that burned in the approximately 5,000-acre Black Fire that was ignited by lightning in 2013. The seeding will help to maintain the pristine nature of the Park and surrounding public lands by mitigating erosion, promoting vegetative recovery and stemming the spread of invasive plants and noxious weeds.

Lages Fire: The BLM Ely District in December aurally-seeded a mixture of predominately sagebrush, and grasses, shrubs and forbs over approximately 5,000 acres, most of it Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, of the Lages Fire that last July burned more than 9,000 acres of primarily public lands, about 60 miles north of Ely, Nev. The aerial seeding compliments an ongoing drill seeding with other grasses, forbs and shrubs. The seeding(s) will aid in vegetative recovery and stem expansion of invasive plants and noxious weeds.

Sampson Fire: The BLM Ely District in December aurally-seeded a mixture of predominantly sagebrush, and grasses, forbs and shrubs over approximately 320 acres, most of it Greater Sage-Grouse habitat, of the 2014 Sampson Fire, about 65 miles north of Ely, Nev., to promote vegetative recovery, stem expansion of invasive plants and noxious weeds, and preserve the wilderness-like characteristics of the public lands neighboring the Becky Peak Wilderness.

North Creek Fire: The BLM Ely District in December completed a one-way chaining at the site of the July 2013 fire in north Spring Valley, about 70 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. The chaining increases the efficacy of an October 2014 aerial seeding conducted in coordination with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW). The BLM and NDOW seeded a mixture of grasses, forbs and shrubs over 978 acres of the approximately 1,019-acre fire. NDOW paid for the helicopter. The BLM provided the seed, labor and project administration.

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### Fuels Reduction and Restoration –

#### Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project Preliminary Environmental Assessment:

The BLM expects in March 2015 to issue a final environmental assessment (EA) and decision record (DR) for the Overland Pass Habitat Improvement Project. The proposed project would be located in greater sage-grouse nesting, summer, and winter habitat; crucial summer, winter and transitional mule deer habitats; and pronghorn antelope habitat along the southern flanks of the Ruby Mountains in both Elko and White Pine counties. The project area would encompass approximately 45,200 acres, of which approximately 18,500 acres would undergo manual, mechanical and prescribed fire treatments over a 10 year period. The project is a collaborative effort by the BLM, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and Nevada Department of Wildlife.

Kern Mountain Landscape Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM expects in 2015-2016 to burn slash piles remaining from tree thinning treatments conducted in the spring and fall of 2014. The project improves watershed health and native habitat, which benefits area wildlife such as elk, mule deer and sage grouse. The project also reduces the risk of a catastrophic wildfire. The project is being implemented in accordance with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Egan and Johnson Basins Restoration Project: The BLM is preparing a preliminary environmental assessment for public review. A release date has not been established. The proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project would be located in the Egan and Johnson basins, about 5 miles west of Cherry Creek, Nev. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve wildlife (sage-grouse) habitat, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, by selectively thinning pinion- juniper. Up to 50-percent of the approximately 14,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Duck Creek Basin Fuels Reduction and Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM is preparing a preliminary environmental assessment for public review. A release date has not been established. The proposed fuels reduction and habitat improvement project would be located in Duck Creek Basin, about 15 miles northeast of Ely, Nev. The project would provide for vegetative diversity and improve habitat for wildlife, such as greater sage-grouse, mule deer, and elk, as well as reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by selectively thinning pinion-pine and juniper, and treating sagebrush communities. Up to 13,000 acres of the approximately 29,000-acre project area would be treated using manual and mechanical treatment methods, and prescribed fire. The project is consistent with the BLM Ely District Resource Management Plan.

Aspen and Sagebrush Steppe Joint Restoration Project with Great Basin National Park: Implementation of the collaborative project between the BLM and Great Basin National Park began in November 2013. When completed, the project will have restored about 1,000 acres of Aspen and sagebrush communities in and around Box Canyon and Kious Basin, in White Pine County, Nev. It will have combined prescribed fire use,



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scheduled in fall 2015, with mechanical treatments that were completed in spring 2014. Project funding comes from Round 11 of the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Combs Creek: Implementation began in late July 2014 with funding provided by the Nevada Department of Wildlife's heritage fund program through the White Pine County Wildlife Advisory Board. The project, located in south Butte Valley about 10 miles northwest of Ely, Nev., reduces fuel loading and improves Greater sage-grouse habitat by selectively thinning pinion-juniper from sagebrush communities. Mastication is scheduled on 750 acres in summer 2015. In all, the BLM plans to treat 4,500 to 7,000 acres of the 23,000-acre project area.

Pioche and Caselton Wildland Urban Interface Project: All major project components have been completed. Remaining slash piles will be burned in fall 2015, as weather conditions allow. The 11,300-acre project designed to improve habitat and protect area residents from catastrophic wildfire was funded by the fuels program and Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.

Patterson Pass Sage Grouse Habitat Improvement Project: The BLM in January 2015 chained an additional 1,000 acres of the project area. The BLM by the end of December 2014 had completed approximately 3,500 acres of the nearly 4,800 acre project. The project is the first implementation of the Cave and Lake Valley Watershed Restoration Plan. The project is funded through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act, Health Land Initiative, Lincoln County Game Board, and the Mule Deer Foundation.

Jakes Valley Sagebrush Restoration Project: Temporarily on hold, the project is designed to improve or restore sagebrush communities, livestock and wildlife habitat, and watershed health while reducing fuel loading by restoring Wyoming sagebrush sites in and around Jakes Wash, 20 miles west of Ely, Nev. The project calls for mowing up to 2,000 acres of the total project area, and thinning pinion and juniper across the total project area, creating a mosaic that provides for wildlife edge areas. The BLM would seed about 60-percent of the treated area with a mix of perennial grasses and forbs.

Stonehouse Prescribed Burn: The BLM is scheduled this winter to continue burning slash piles remaining from a pinion-juniper tree-thinning project near Lages Junction and Schellbourne Pass in the Schell Creek Range, about 70 miles north of Ely, weather permitting. The Stonehouse Prescribed Burn reduced hazardous fuels accumulations to protect the watershed from potentially large, lethal wildfires; treated fuels to improve health and restore ecological stability, reduced or halted the encroachment of pinion-pine and Utah juniper trees to restore and promote wildlife habitat resiliency, and recycled nutrients and enhanced species diversity of fire-adapted and fire-dependent vegetation.

Shingle Creek Aspen Restoration Project: Weather permitting, the BLM is scheduled to burn white fir slash piles in winter 2015-2016. The aspen restoration project is located on the west slope of the Snake Range near Great Basin National Park, about 40 miles southeast of Ely, Nev. Removing the conifers will promote aspen regeneration and health.

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North Antelope Habitat Restoration: Mastication on approximately 1,000 acres of pinion-pine and juniper was completed in January 2015. The 12,000-acre habitat improvement project located on the north end of the Antelope Range, about 70 miles northeast of Ely, Nev., is nearly 85-percent complete.

Cold Springs Project: A contractor is thinning pinion-juniper through a service contract that allows him to purchase the product for resale. The BLM is scheduled this winter to burn slash piles remaining from previous thinning efforts, weather permitting. The project goal is to provide a hazardous fuel break and demonstration area depicting various pinion-juniper thinning densities.

South Steptoe Valley Watershed Restoration Project: The BLM and Nevada Department of Wildlife have completed a 5,000-acre pinion-juniper chaining within the project area, located in south Steptoe Valley. Hand thinning will continue this spring on an additional 2,870 acres through two contracts. The BLM expects in summer 2015 to chain an additional 2,000 acres of the project area and possibly implement prescribed fire treatments.

### LANDS & REALTY

Lincoln and White Pine County Land Disposals identified in the Lincoln and White Pine County Conservation, Recreation and Development Acts, and Ely Resource Management Plan:

- White Pine County Land Disposals: The Federal Register Notice (FRN) has been published for the following land sales: Squaw Peak (Egan Field Office) and Mosier Canyon (Schell Field Office). The sales are scheduled at 10 a.m., Wednesday, April 1, 2015, at the BLM Ely District Office, 702 North Industrial Way, in Ely. Registration opens at 9 a.m.
- Lincoln County Land Disposals: The Ely District, Caliente Field Office is processing three land sales: Windmill Sale, Cowboy Sale and Hiko Sale. Lincoln County Round 3 is also being processed for four areas: Alamo, Caliente, Panaca and Pioche.

### MINERALS

#### Active Mining Plans –

Bald Mountain Mine: The BLM is finalizing alternatives in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for a Barrick Gold US, Inc., proposal to expand the Bald Mountain Mine located in White Pine County, about 70 miles northwest of Ely and 30 miles northeast of Eureka, Nev. The DEIS is expected to be released for public review in early 2015. The 45-day comment period will include public meetings. The proposal calls for the expansion of existing mine facilities in the North Operations Area Project,

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expansion of the existing Casino/Winrock Plan of Operations and incorporating it into the North Operations Area Project, and establishment of a South Operations Area Project that would encompass and expand the existing Yankee and Alligator Ridge mine sites. Expanding the North Operations Area Project and incorporating the Casino/Winrock Plan of Operations into the North Operations Area Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 9,124 acres to 13,704 acres and add four new heap leach pads. Establishing the South Operations Area Project would increase the total surface disturbance from 960 acres to 3,643 acres. The South Operation Area Project Plan of Operations would include an electrical transmission line and an access road between the North and South operations areas.

Gold Rock Mine Project: The BLM has released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) for Midway Gold US Inc.'s proposed Gold Rock Mine Project in White Pine County, about 50 miles west of Ely. The public is invited to comment during a 45-day review period that concludes **Monday, March 30, 2015**. The BLM has scheduled three public meetings in Nevada, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Dates and locations are:

- Tuesday, March 10, Great Basin Community College, Ely Center, 2115 Bobcat Drive, Ely
- Wednesday, March 11, Eureka County Courthouse, 10 South Main Street, Eureka
- Thursday, March 12, Best Western Plus Reno Airport Plaza Hotel and Conference Center, 1981 Terminal Way, Reno

The proposed Gold Rock Mine Project would be constructed and operated in the same geographic area as the reclaimed and closed Easy Junior Mine. The project area consists of a total of 18,745 acres of BLM public lands with the majority of the mine facilities located within a fenced mine area totaling 8,757 acres. A total of 3,946 acres of disturbance would be authorized. The majority of this area would be reclaimed, while a small portion would not. The draft EIS analyzes Midway's proposed action, six action alternatives, and the No Action Alternative. The action alternatives were developed to help reduce project-related impacts to greater sage-grouse and mule deer. The Draft EIS also identifies and analyzes a suite of mitigation measures designed minimize the impact of the proposed action and its alternatives.

The Proposed Action would consist of an open pit, two waste rock disposal areas, a heap leach pad and processing ponds, a carbon-in-leach plant, a tailings storage facility, haul and access roads, growth medium stockpiles, ancillary support facilities, and exploration associated with mining operations. Also under the Proposed Action, a 69-kV transmission line would extend south from the Pan Mine to the Gold Rock Mine Project electric system, and a county road that currently passes through the Gold Rock Mine Project area would be re-located onto existing and new BLM and county roads.

The projected mining period is 10 years, with associated construction, closure, reclamation and post-closure monitoring periods extending the project life to approximately 48 years. Midway Gold US Inc. estimates that the project would create between 150-250 jobs.

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The Draft EIS describes seven action alternatives and is posted on-line at: <http://on.doi.gov/1zAxyW9>. For more information, contact Dan Netcher, BLM Project Manager, at (775) 289-1872 or [dnetcher@blm.gov](mailto:dnetcher@blm.gov).

Pan Mine Project: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office on Friday, Dec. 20, 2013, issued the Record of Decision for Midway Gold U.S., Inc.'s Pan Mine Project to be located in the Pancake Mountain Range in White Pine County, Nev., about 50 miles west of Ely or 22 miles southeast of Eureka. The decision allows the mining operator to construct and operate a new heap leach gold mine that would consist of two primary open pits, three satellite pits, one heap leach pad, three rock disposal areas and a transmission line. The total surface disturbance would be approximately 3,301 acres.

The BLM decision was to select the Southwest Power Line and Waste Rock Disposal Site Design alternatives with applicant-committed environmental protection measures and the mitigation measures specified in Sections 4.2 through 4.18 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Southwest Power Line Alternative was developed to avoid potential impacts to Greater Sage-Grouse from the Proposed Action power line. The Waste Rock Disposal Site Design Alternative would involve a conventional waste rock disposal design and move waste rock away from more important Greater Sage-Grouse habitat in order to minimize impacts.

An appeal and petition for stay were filed by the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Reservation on Jan. 21, 2014. The BLM filed their opposition to the petition for stay on Jan. 30, 2014. On Aug. 19, 2014, the Office of Hearings and Appeals denied the petition for stay. Mine construction activities are ongoing and construction of the Southwest Power Line has also begun.

Hogum Mining District: Two small mine operators are mining for gold on the slopes of Hogum disturbing approximately 15 acres.

### Notices and Exploration –

DHI Minerals LTD on Jan. 6, 2015, submitted a Notice of Intent for the Green Springs Exploration Project for two exploration drill holes on 1.12 acres in Railroad Valley near the closed Green Springs Mine. The Egan Field Office is reviewing the notice for completeness.

The Meadow Bay Gold Corporation Plan of Operation for Exploration was approved on March 19, 2014. The Environmental Assessment (EA) was finalized and the Decision Record and Finding of No Significant Impact were also signed. Meadow Bay plans to drill 69 exploratory holes in and around the Atlanta Mine site, located approximately 33 miles northeast of Pioche, Nev.

The BLM completed its review of comments received on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA), which analyzed impacts of Aurion Gold's intended exploration for gold

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at Logan Pass in the Mt. Irish Area of Critical Environmental Concern, located about five miles west of Hiko, Nev. The comment period concluded in March 2014. A decision has been signed and authorization is expected shortly.

The BLM has reviewed comments received on the preliminary environmental assessment (EA) for the Gold Springs Exploration Project, located about 21 miles east of Pioche, Nev. The public comment period concluded in February 2014. Gold Springs, LLC, a subsidiary of High Desert Gold in May 2013 submitted a Plan of Operations. The plan proposes to disturb up to 100 acres. Gold Springs is currently conducting disturbance on two sites of 4.9 and 2.7 acres, respectively.

### Mineral Materials –

The Ely District sells mineral materials from 14 Community pits and through exclusive sale permits.

### Oil & Gas Exploration/Development –

The BLM on Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2014, generated \$1,814.00 during its quarterly oil and gas competitive lease sale held in Reno. The BLM sold one parcel comprising 473.22 acres. The sale high bid at \$2 per acre was made by Kirkwood Oil & Gas, LLC. The lease is for a period of 10 years with annual rentals of \$1.50 per acre for the first five years and \$2 an acre after that until production begins. Once a lease is producing, a royalty of 12.5 percent is charged. Nearly half the bid and rental receipts go to the state of Nevada. The BLM offered 97 parcels totaling 189,176.96 acres on the Ely District in eastern Nevada. The next BLM oil and gas sale is scheduled on March 10, 2015, in the Elko District.

The BLM has received three Applications for Permit to Drill (APD). Makoil Oil submitted an APD to drill in Coal Valley on July 31, 2014. The Caliente Field Office determined it complete this fall and is currently completing an EA. PetroHunt submitted an APD to drill in Jakes Valley on Oct. 30, 2014. The Egan Field Office determined that their APD is complete, and an EA is underway. On Jan. 8, 2015, Tetuan submitted an APD to continue exploration drilling in a new location on their Mariagnes lease in Railroad Valley. The Egan Field Office is reviewing their APD for completeness.

Two drilling operations remain active since 2014, including Makoil's Portuguese Well in Railroad Valley near Portuguese Mountain, and Sam Oil Pluto Well in Gleason Basin near Robinson Summit. Drilling operations have so far been exploratory in nature.

### **NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEED MANAGEMENT**

The BLM Ely District is implementing the 2010 Integrated Weed Management Plan that provides for the inventory, treatment, and monitoring of non-native and noxious invasive weeds. The plan includes weed prevention procedures and treatment options, including herbicides, for use in and outside of Wilderness; as well as outreach and education measures. (Use of herbicides in threatened and endangered species habitat requires

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consultation.) The BLM works with private landowners, non-profit organizations and local, state and federal agencies through 10 Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs).

### **RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

District staff continues to monitor and assess rangeland conditions associated with forage and water availability and coordinate with permittees regarding grazing management actions associated with drought conditions.

The field offices in spring 2015 will send drought information letters to grazing permittees. The letters inform permittees about the abnormally dry conditions, in addition to providing an opportunity to plan for changes in the 2015 grazing season, if necessary.

Staff continues to fully process and renew term grazing permits (TPR), plan range improvement projects (riparian and spring developments, fences, and more), and process grazing applications and transfers. Links to documents are located on the BLM website at: [https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa\\_register.do](https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do)

### **RECREATION & TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING**

Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System: The BLM Ely District, Caliente Field Office is partnering with the City of Caliente, Lincoln County, Nevada Division of State Parks and International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) to design environmentally-sustainable, multipurpose non-motorized trails systems to connect the public lands with existing and planned-for trails systems within Caliente and nearby Kershaw-Ryan State Park.

Planning and design is being funded by \$90,000 in partner contributions. The BLM and City of Caliente have requested funding for implementation through Round 15 of the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA).

The BLM is seeking \$2 million to construct up to 25 miles of trails systems and a trailhead with restrooms and shade structures. The City of Caliente is requesting funding to build five miles of trails to compliment the already existing Meadow Valley Wash Linear Park, a two-plus mile walkway through Caliente that was also funded through SNPLMA.

Ash Springs Recreation Site: The closure of a spring-fed soaking pool and the area around it at the Ash Springs Recreation Site, about 100 miles north of Las Vegas, will continue for 2 years, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced in a *Federal Register* notice published Friday, June 6, 2014.

The temporary 2-year closure of the area along U.S. Highway 93 in Lincoln County is necessary because extensive modification of the man-made pool by public users has made it unsafe and is degrading habitat for endangered species.

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During the closure period the BLM will consider the possibilities for managing the recreation site, whether repairs to the pool are feasible and if traditional uses are impairing habitat for the Federally-listed endangered White River springfish and three listed BLM Nevada Sensitive Species. Substantial repairs to the site would require additional funding, planning and coordination, which the BLM would analyze in an environmental assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act incorporating public comments. BLM received funding to prepare the management plan and environmental assessment to analyze the issues and possible future management options. BLM will work with the community on the development of the plan. A newly formed friends group who is seeking non-profit status is also participating in planning as they are focused on management of the Little Ash Spring site.

The area was closed on an emergency basis last summer. The closure is necessary to allow BLM the time to assess the damage and determine the best course of action. The publication of the Notice of Temporary Closure in the Federal Register signals the start of the 2-year closure.

Travel Management Planning: The BLM Ely District, Egan Field Office is preparing a plan for approximately 1,428,000 acres within the Huntington, Jakes, Long, Newark and Ruby valleys, in White Pine County. The BLM will release the draft plan for public comment.

### **WILD HORSES**

The BLM Ely District continues to monitor wild horse conditions, districtwide, and in particular in the Silver King Herd Management Area (HMA) and the north end of Butte Valley where forage availability is a concern. Census flights are tentatively scheduled this spring in the Antelope, Eagle and Silver King HMAs, as well as the Moriah herd Area.

### **WILDERNESS**

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ely Ranger District Wilderness Management Plan: The public comment period for the Ely Ranger District Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment, and proposed amendment to the Humboldt National Forest Plan concluded Dec. 17, 2014. The plan would provide supplemental management direction for the preservation of wilderness character in the Ely Ranger District's nine wilderness areas and Bureau of Land Management-administered portion of the Mt. Moriah Wilderness. A final decision is anticipated in February 2015. For more information, contact Joshua T. Simpson, Natural Resource Specialist, Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, Ely Ranger District, at 775-289-5129 or [jtsimpson@fs.fed.us](mailto:jtsimpson@fs.fed.us).

Bristlecone Wilderness & Goshute Canyon Wilderness Management Plan and Environmental Assessment: The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Decision Record (DR) were signed Dec. 18, 2014.

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Lands with Wilderness Characteristics: The BLM is performing project by project inventory updates for Lands with Wilderness Character (e.g. Oil & Gas Lease Sale).

### SPECIAL LEGISLATION

Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act (SNPLMA): The Round 15 nomination period closed Friday, Nov. 7, 2014. The Ely District submitted seven projects; three under the Eastern Nevada Landscape Restoration Project addressing sage-grouse habitat, and state and transition models; three in the Conservation Initiatives category addressing cave management planning, and desert tortoise and Pahrump poolfish habitat; and one in Capital Improvement that would provide for trails in the Caliente area (*see Lincoln County Partners Multi-Purpose Non-Motorized Trail System, page 14*).

The Sub-group committees will meet in February to formulate a recommendation for funding to the Partners Working Group. The Partners Working Group will meet in April to review their recommendation.

SNPLMA Round 14 Environmentally Responsible Closure of Abandoned Mine Safety Hazards in Lincoln County: The project will enable the BLM to secure approximately 30-50 of the highest priority abandoned mine land (AML) features within Lincoln County (which pose significant threats to public and wildlife safety) by bat-gating, backfilling, and foaming. Inventory of abandoned mines will begin summer of 2015 with subsequent biological, cultural and sensitive plant species inventories to follow. Projected end date is summer 2019.

Lincoln County Archaeological Initiative (LCAI): A request for proposals for Round 8 was published January 13, 2015. Proposals are due by March 13<sup>th</sup>. The Archaeological Resources Team (ART) will meet in April to review the proposals and provide a recommendation for funding to the Partners Working Group in May.

Funding for LCAI comes from revenues generated through the sale of public lands identified for disposal in the Lincoln County Lands Act and existing land-use plans. The Act created a special account in which 85-percent of the revenues from land sales are deposited. Funds in the special account may be used for a number of activities, including the study of archaeological resources in Lincoln County. The remaining funds are distributed to the State of Nevada (5-percent) and Lincoln County (10-percent).

To date the BLM has approved \$7,190,523 for archaeological projects in Lincoln County. Expenditures approved include documenting Paiute and Shoshone rock art sites, and oral histories and practices; archaeological site inventories; obsidian toolstone research; settlement pattern studies; educational brochures and websites; and upgrade of archaeological collections by inventorying, re-marking and repackaging of artifacts collected from public lands in Lincoln County.

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*Contact Chris Hanefeld, BLM Ely District public affairs specialist, at (775) 289-1842 or [chanefel@blm.gov](mailto:chanefel@blm.gov) for more information on these and other projects/programs in the BLM Ely District.*